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ABSTRACT

An effective means of teaching parliamentary procedure to high school students is the Student Congress. Advance planning and imagination are necessary to the success of the Congress. Included in the advance planning are discussions of the types of legislation permitted and the governing body to which each resolution is directed. The point system used for student rating, campaign rules, and procedures are explained to the students. Students are provided with materials, and references are available. Results show that students become proficient in using parliamentary procedure, learn to debate, to work cooperatively, to validate their facts, and to work effectively within the "system." In the Little Rock Public Schools, the Student Congress is part of Speech I, of Public Speaking, and of Communication III. An outline of the implementation of the Student Congress is appended. (RB)

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TEACHING PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE THROUGH THE STUDENT CONGRESS

by Marguerite Pearce Metcalf

Knowing parliamentary procedure does not always guarantee effective practice of it. Memorizing parliamentary rules is not synonomous with understanding them. Rentention and recall often bear little relationship to implementation and usage. Therefore, in selecting a method for teaching parliamentary procedure to high school students, a means must be devised which will sufficiently motivate them to learn it by practicing it in a simulated situation - preferably one they will find challenging, interesting, and relevant to their causes. The student congress seems to meet these requirements.

The Student Congress, however, is not successful just because the format makes it easy to adapt. Rather, there are essentially two keys that unlock the doors to a successful congress, both of them in the hands of the instructor. Advance planning and imagination are essential to the smooth-running of the unit.

To the first, advance planning. Assuming the congress is to fit into the course like any other unit, the explanation of the congress and target dates for beginning it should be discussed before the preceding unit is finished. This planning session, which also builds interest and lays the ground work, may take several class periods. Experience has proved it advisable to space the discussion periods several days or a week apart. As students begin to think about the congress, a number of questions come to their minds. Subjects covered in these planning sessions are legion, and they vary with each class. Items that should be covered include the types of legislation permitted and the governing body to which each resolution is directed. Passing out bills from former years done by friends of the present class always creates interest. The point system used for daily rating of the stu-

dents should be explained and campaign rules and procedures should be agreed upon. Here, the instructor can mention the different types of voting, the work of the tellers, construction and delivery of nomination and campaign speeches. Naturally, the teacher has done her homework in detail far in advance of these class planning sessions.

Imagination, flanked by alertness and quick-thinking, on the part of the sponsor is essential during the weeks in congress. No two classes are alike, therefore no two "houses" will operate in exactly the same way. Though problems almost always arise, they will probably not be the same problems in any two sections of the same course. The poor sponsor, then, must be ready for any eventuality. Obviously, her knowledge and usage of parliamentary procedure must be thorough and broad in scope. Using tact and ingenuity, the instructor should set up some "ground rules" that will move the legislation along and at the same time accomplish the objectives she has set up for the unit. These guidelines have little or nothing to do with parliamentary procedure, but they are necessary to prevent bogging down of interest and accomplishment. For instance, a rule that outlaws filabustering prevents the loafers from having fun at class expense. Having it understood that all bills come out of committee gives even the timid student a chance to get his bill to the floor. Making sure there are four typewritten copies of each bill (one for the bulletin board, one for the clerk, one for the committee, and one for the authors) affords each student the opportunity to prepare debate on the legislation. Limiting each bill to one typewritten page demands organization of the content and economy of words.

But imagination is even more important in other facets of the congress. Very little class time is given to lecture on or discussion of the rules of parliamentary procedure prior to opening the congress. Students have in hand a textbook which usually has one chapter on motions and the order of business. They are also given charts and pocket book editions of useful material. Within easy reach, in the classroom, is a reference shelf containing every book that can be found on the

subject. Students are urged to try out motions they understand, first, and then go to motions they are unfamiliar with. As they succeed or fail in their attempts to get their legislation passed, numerous "recess" periods have to be called in order for the teacher to explain or offer a better way to get the business passed. Sometimes, a matter of ethical use of a given motion is at stake and must be corrected. Obviously, the first sessions are laborious with frequent recess periods and lengthy ones, but learning is taking place and the teacher needs to keep the breaks in the congress as brief as possible when stoppages are necessary. Obviously, too, some students will stay with the motions they know and throw the congress into a rut. At this point, if the instructor will take her seat in the chamber and become one of the members of the group, debating and throwing in motions the group does not know, life will come back into the session. Often the instructor is challenged by the class. It goes without saying, the teacher abides by the ground rules the students observe, taking no unfair advantage at any time. Spirited debate by the sponsor can make many students rush for the library. Other techniques will occur to the teacher as the unit progresses.

Implementation of the student congress, step-by-step, is outlined in the attached mimeographed pages. There is no need to explain the process further. From that outline and this brief commentary, it should be apparent that proficiency in using parliamentary procedure is not the only benefit the congress has to offer high school students. They find opportunity to debate, to work with other students cooperatively, to increase their knowledge and understanding of state, national, and world affairs. They learn the importance of validating their facts and the true significance of ethics. Most important, they learn how to work effectively within the "system" and that working within the framework can accomplish the task just as quickly and more permanently than more dramatic drastic methods.

In the Little Rock Public Schools, the Student Congress is a part of Speech I, the basic fundamentals course open to tenth and eleventh students; of Public Speaking,

a course in forensics open to eleventh and twelfth students who have had Speech I; and of Communication III, a course open to twelfth students who have had no previous speech training. Is there overlapping? No. The units come at the same time in the semester and the classes pass bills back and forth, making extra "red" points (credit for bills) for each additional house the legislation passes. Issues and interests of the various classes differ as does the in-depth debate.

To some students, the congress is a breakthrough in communicating with ease and using parliamentary procedure with efficiency. To others, it is an experience boring and dull. As previously indicated, much depends upon the interest, knowledge, planning, and imagination of the instructor. There are no guarantees and there is no quick way to succeed with it. Careful analysis after each unit is completed and practice over the years will increase the effectiveness of it as well as the enjoyment of the experience.

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PROCEDURE FOR USING THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CONGRESS AS A TEACHING DEVICE

1. Let the class divide itself into two parties and let each pick a name. Try to avoid the names "Democrat" and "Republican" because of the connotation each carries with a given student. Permit any student to remain "Independent", but with the knowledge that as an "Independent" he cannot expect party support for his bills and he cannot caucus with other "Independents."

   a. Pick a party leader - "whip"

   b. Let each party compose a platform on national and state issues

   c. Select party nominees for

      "Speaker of the House" or "President of the Senate"

      "Vice-Speaker"

      "Clerk" "Clerk"

   d. Select students to make nominating speeches

2. On a given day have the nominating speeches.

3. On another day have campaign speeches. During the two or three days of campaigning permit the speech room to be plastered with posters and placards for the several candidates.

4. Prior to this unit, directions should be given the students for organizing the occasional speeches related to this unit.

5. Prior to this unit, the students should be given directions for composing a "resolution" which to the student Congress is known as a "bill". A bill may be made by one person, two people, or by a committee.

6. While the campaigning is going on (2 days at the most), tellers should be appointed (bi-partisan), ballots made, and committees set up. The committees should be bi-partisan where possible. For a class of thirty use four or five committees. Suggestion: foreign affairs; health, education, welfare; politics and government; labor and business; agriculture and conservation; internal affairs. The clerk channels the bills to the proper committee. All bills MUST COME OUT OF COMMITTEE - with either a "DO NOT PASS" or a "DO PASS". If they come out with a "Do Not Pass" the majority report will be negative. If they come out with a "Do Pass" the majority report will be an affirmative report. If committee action is unanimous, there will be no minority report - majority only - affirmative or negative.

7. Elect officers.

8. Have acceptance speeches.

9. Call your congress the Congress of Human Relations.

10. The Speaker of the House (If you have two classes, let one of them be the Senate) calls the Congress to order and asks the clerk to read the agenda after which he calls for the Clerk to read the first bill on the agenda (this is after the reading of the previous day's proceedings or after having dispensed with the minutes).

11. After the reading of the first bill, the procedure is as follows:

    a. Majority report - 3 minutes - tells why the committee favors the bill or rejects it.

    b. Minority report - 3 minutes - takes the opposite side.

    c. Author's report - 5 minutes.

    (During these reports no one may interrupt for questions unless the speaker stops and indicates he would welcome questions.)

    d. Debate - 3 minutes each speaker - from the floor alternating between affirmative and negative. Opinion debate should be avoided and may be avoided easily if the agenda is posted far enough in advance for the students to find what bills are coming up and do research on them.

    e. Representatives may yield their time to a friendly speaker.

    f. All bills must be one page only, presented typed, and in triplicate one for the clerk, one for the bulletin board, and one for the committee.

    g. No bill is given a number until it comes OUT of committee though the "time" the clerk receives it is noted in the proper place.

    h. A Representative is permitted to interrupt a speaker and ask the Speaker if he will yield. If the speaker indicates he does not wish to be interrupted, he cannot again be interrupted.

12. The Clerk should designate a definite time and place she will receive bills.

13. Committee meetings should be a regular part of the class work. At a given time when the agenda is small, the House should adjourn into committees. Party caucuses must be held outside of class except for the organizational ones.

14. No Representative may rise for debate and make a motion while he has the floor for debate. This procedure amounts to "prefacing a motion."

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